



## *The Middle Fork*

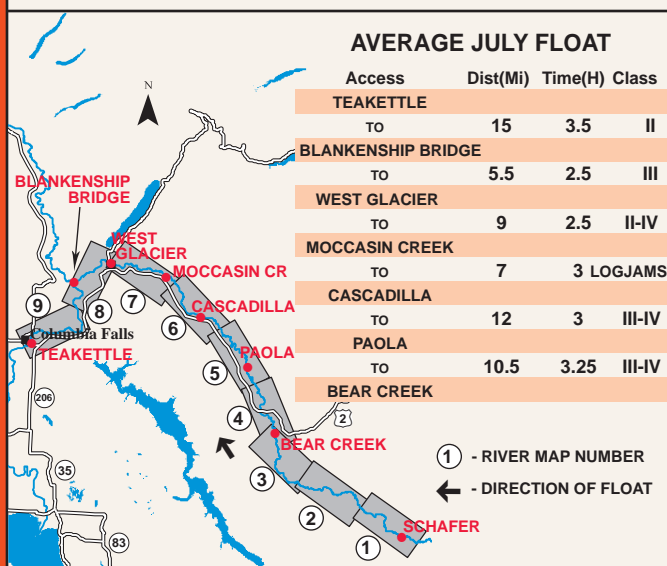
The Middle Fork of the Flathead River originates in the heart of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The upper section of the river offers primitive recreation in a wilderness setting. From the headwaters to Schafer Meadows, a narrow channel and log jams make the river generally unsuitable for floating. Most trips start from Schafer Meadows, which can be reached by trail or by aircraft. The float season normally lasts from mid-May through mid-July, with peak runoff in late May. Numerous Class IV and V rapids can make the trip extremely difficult during peak flows. Be prepared for periods of cold wet weather.

The lower section of the river offers more accessible recreation in a more developed setting. Flathead National Forest and private lands border the south bank, river left, and Glacier National Park borders the bank on the north, river right. Please respect private landowners' rights. The float season on the lower Middle Fork extends from mid-May to early September. Numerous rapids ranging from Class II to Class IV make for a challenging trip during high water. Several public access sites provide many options for day floats.



## Please Remember:

- The party size in the Great Bear Wilderness is 15 people per party.
- Store all attractants in a bear resistant manner, in an approved container, in your vehicle, or suspend in a tree at least 10 feet up and 4 feet out.
- The Middle Fork's water is incredibly pure, please help keep it that way for the west slope cutthroat and bull trout.



# Regulations

Pursuant to 36 CFR 261

Middle Fork	(1) Waste Re- quirement	(2) Campfire Allowed	(3) Camping Allowed	(4) Stay Limit	(5) Motor Boats 10 h.p.
Schafer to Bear Creek	Y*	R	Y	16	N
Castle Creek Site	Y	R	Y	See Dates	N
Bear Creek River Access	N	--	Y	3	N
Essex Dispersed Site	N	R	Y	3	Y
Paola River Access	N	--	Y	3	Y
Cascadilla River Access	N	--	Y	3	Y
Mocassin River Access	N	N	Y	3	Y
West Glacier River Access	N	N	N	Day Use Only	Y
Blankenship NW	N	N	N	Day Use Only	Y
Blankenship SW	Y	R	Y	3	Y

**Other dispersed sites along the river, outside of wilderness, not listed above are available for overnight use. Campers in overnight dispersed sites must pack out solid human waste, a fire pan/blanket is required, and the camping stay limit is 16 days.**

## Boundaries Between Federal Agencies

Glacier National Park is on river right and Flathead National Forest is on river left, with the boundary being the average high-water line on river right. Rules and regulations are different between the Park and the Forest. If you plan to go ashore in Glacier National Park contact the park about specific regulations.

**Special Regulations:** No camping in the Bear Creek to Essex section; and no stopping within ¼ mile above or below the Goat Lick Viewpoint for the protection of the mountain goats in the area. **(58(a)(z))**

These regulations apply within the Wild and Scenic River corridor, which is approximately 1/4 mile each side of the river, except as noted.

### **(1) WASTE DISPOSAL - (58(z))**

**Y** - Solid human waste must be **self-contained** and packed out to an approved disposal site during **overnight** stays at locations without public toilet facilities.

This applies whether you are part of a traditional float party or vehicle supported party. Self-contained means, (1) using a washable, leak-proof, reusable toilet system - the contents must be disposed of at a proper waste facility such as an RV dump station, OR (2) a disposable biodegradable bag toilet system that is approved for landfill disposal. Bags must be self-contained within a leak or spill proof container until they are properly disposed of. The system must be adequate for the size of the group and length of trip. Dumping solid human waste on National Forest System lands or into a vault toilet is prohibited.

**Y\*** - Solid human waste containment required within 200 feet of river's edge.

**N** - Sites with public toilet facilities.

### **(2) CAMPFIRE ALLOWED - (52(a))**

**R** - Required metal fire pan or blanket.

Ash may be disposed of on site within the river corridor.

**N** - Campfires prohibited.

**\*\*** - Campfires are prohibited in the parking lots at the river access sites but they are permissible below the high water line.

### **(3) CAMPING ALLOWED - (58(a))**

**Y** - Camping allowed.

**N** - Camping prohibited. If vehicle supported, contact the Hungry Horse/Glacier View Ranger District for information about motorized use in the river corridor.

### **(4) STAY LIMIT - (58(a)(I))**

**Stay Limit** in number of days.

**Day use hours** are from sunrise to sunset.

**Castle Creek Site** - One night maximum stay limit April 1 - July 31; two night maximum stay limit August 1 - October 31; sixteen day stay limit from November 1 - March 31. Stock containment is prohibited at the Castle River Campsite.

### **(5) MOTOR BOATS - (58(n))**

**Y** - Motor boats allowed, 10 horse power or less.

**N** - Motor boats prohibited.

**DISPERSED SITE** - A site without developed facilities such as toilets or fire rings.

### **RM 74.5: Miner Creek Trail #81 -**

A short two mile hike leads to Scott Lake. In another two miles is Flotilla Lake, an alpine lake with good fishing. At the mouth of Morrison Creek is the site of the original ranger station built around 1906. Few remnants of the original station remain.

### **RM 77.8: Lodgepole Mountain Trail #337 -**

The mountain is the site of a former fire lookout. There are stunning views of the Middle Fork drainage and Glacier National Park.

*Schafer Meadows Landing Strip, in the Great Bear Wilderness, is the only open airstrip in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. Used as a trailhead for wilderness users, it is also the most popular access for floaters on the upper Middle Fork Flathead River. If you access Schafer Meadows by air, please limit your total flights to reduce your impact on other wilderness visitors.*



### **RM 80: Schafer Work Center -**

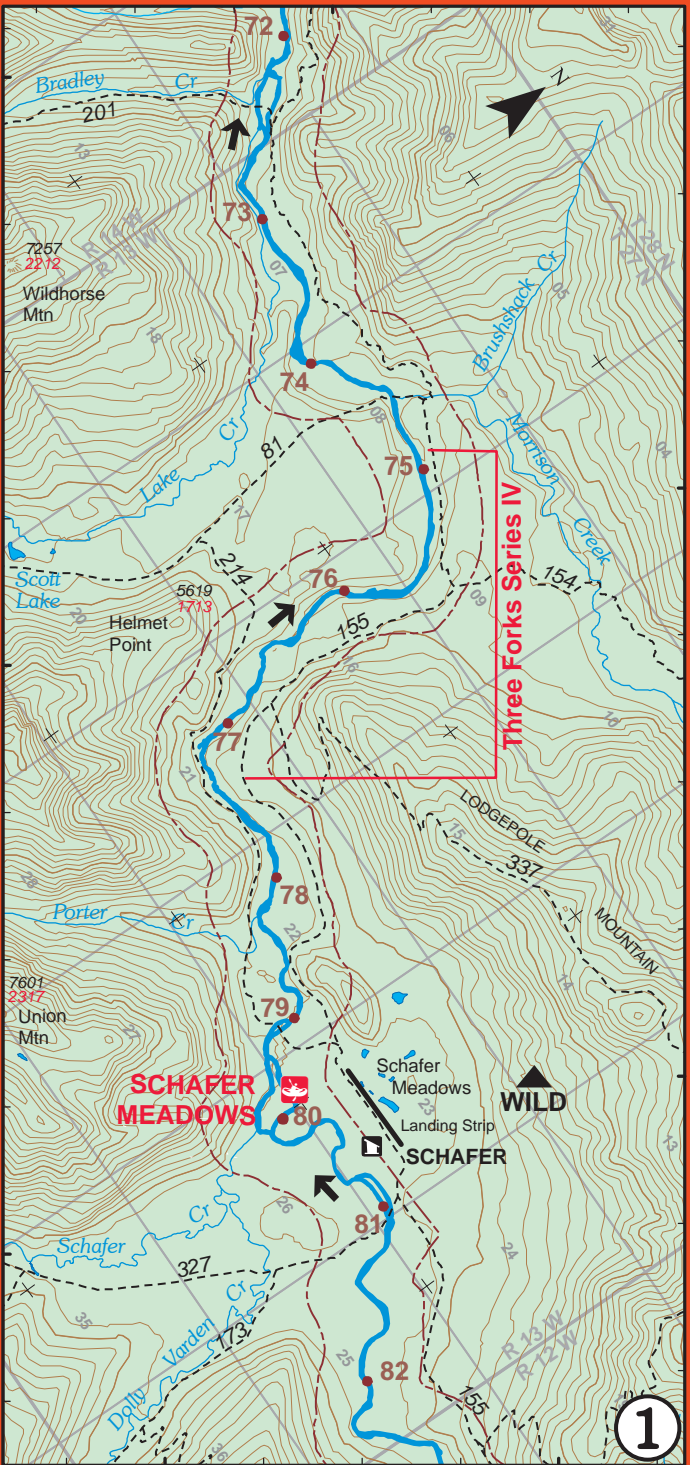
The historic Schafer Work Center is a piece of living history built between 1926 and 1928. Here, Forest Service workers still use hand tools to maintain trails and facilities, treat noxious weeds and support fire management. Despite being located on the airstrip, all food and supplies for workers stationed here are delivered by Forest Service packers and pack stock. Stop in at the work center for current river and trail information.

113°21'0"W

48°6'0"N

48°4'30"N

48°3'0"N



48°7'30"N

48°6'0"N

113°13'30"W

113°12'0"W

1

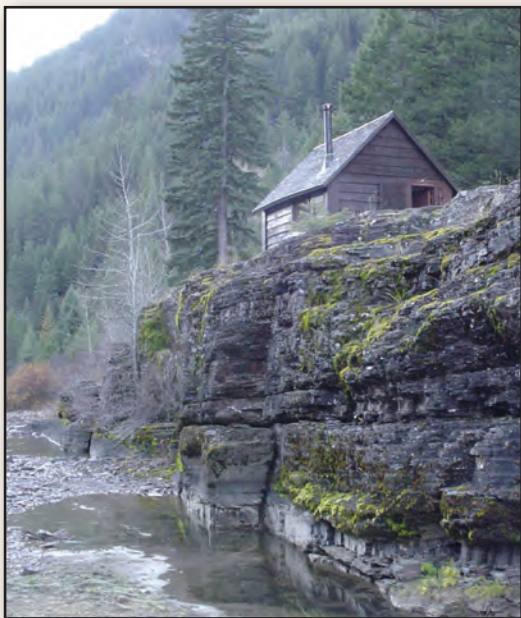


### **RM 68: Castle Creek Campsite -**

The campsite has two distinct camp areas. Each site is limited to one night per party from April 1 to July 30 and two nights from August 1 to October 31.

Overnight stock containment is not permitted in these campsites for resource protection.

Campfires are not allowed in a fire ring; fires only permitted with the use of a fire pan or blanket.



### **RM 68.8: Granite Cabin -**

One of many cabins used by Forest Service employees and volunteers as a place to stay while doing wilderness and river patrols and trail work.

### **RM 69.3: Granite Creek Trail #156 -**

The trail provides access to the upper Middle Fork. Kayakers hauling craft to the river, please use caution. This is a main stock trail. Mules and horses are easily spooked by kayaks, paddles, and other gear. When you encounter groups riding or leading livestock, step well off the trail on the downhill side and stand quietly until they pass.

113°30'0"W

113°28'30"W

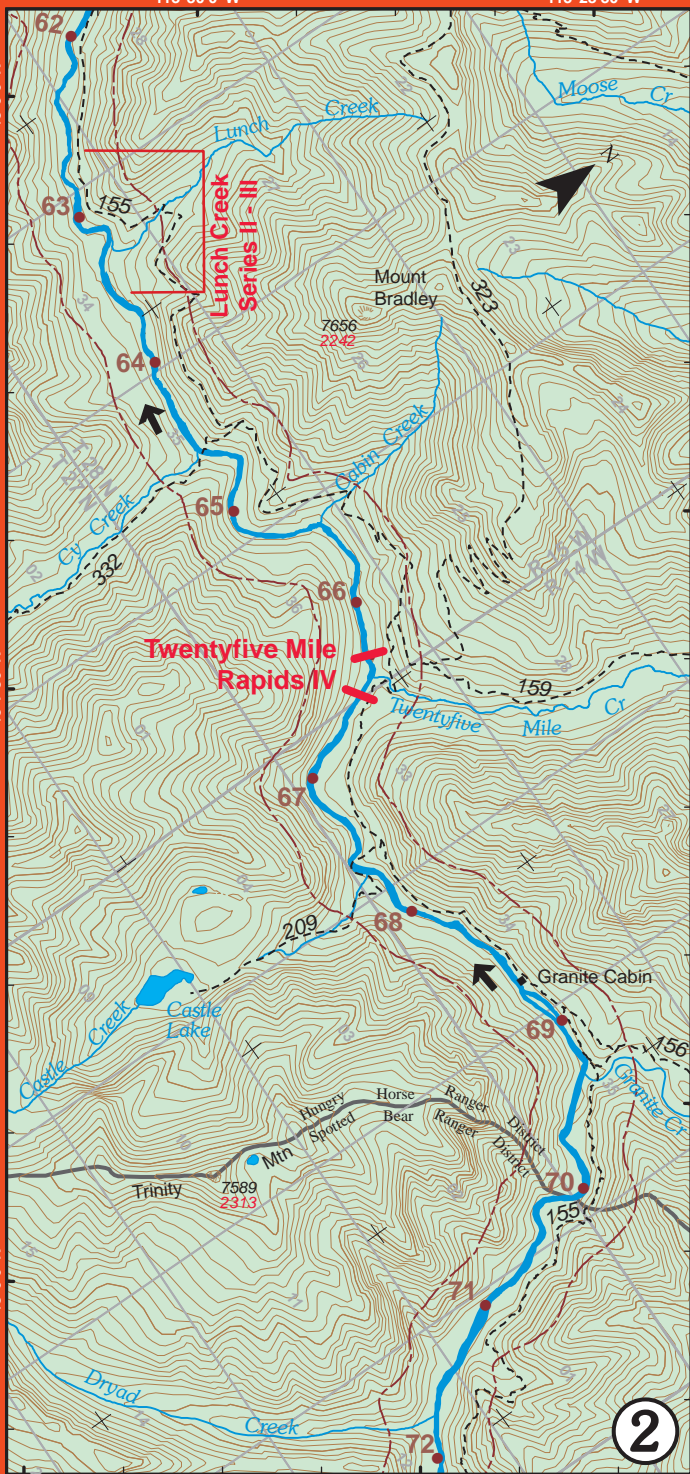
48°9'0"N

48°7'30"N

48°6'0"N

48°10'30"N

48°9'0"N



2



*Big River Trail #155 is the spine of the Middle Fork Trail system. Vinegar Mountain, Dirtyface, and Edna are a few of the secondary trails that lead away from the river further into the Great Bear Wilderness Area.*

**RM 54-53: Bear Creek River Access & Trailhead -**

The trailhead is popular for floaters and stock users.

**RM 59-57: Spruce Park Series -**

These rapids are a series of plunge pools with high canyon walls known for its challenging hydraulics.



*The Middle Fork has flooded many times, the most notable in 1964. The river washed away Spruce Park Cabin, a Forest Service administrative site. The cabin was rebuilt on higher ground and is used today by Forest Service work crews.*

*The mountains and river valleys that provide the scenic backdrop for your float took millions of years to create. Two million years ago, tectonic pressure caused buckling, uplifting, volcanic activity and earthquakes, creating the area's mountain ranges. After the mountain building, stream and glacial erosion carved out many of landforms you see today.*

*The river's greenish hue comes from the small amount of iron found within the rock walls surrounding the river corridor.*

113°37'30"W

113°36'0"W

48°15'0"N

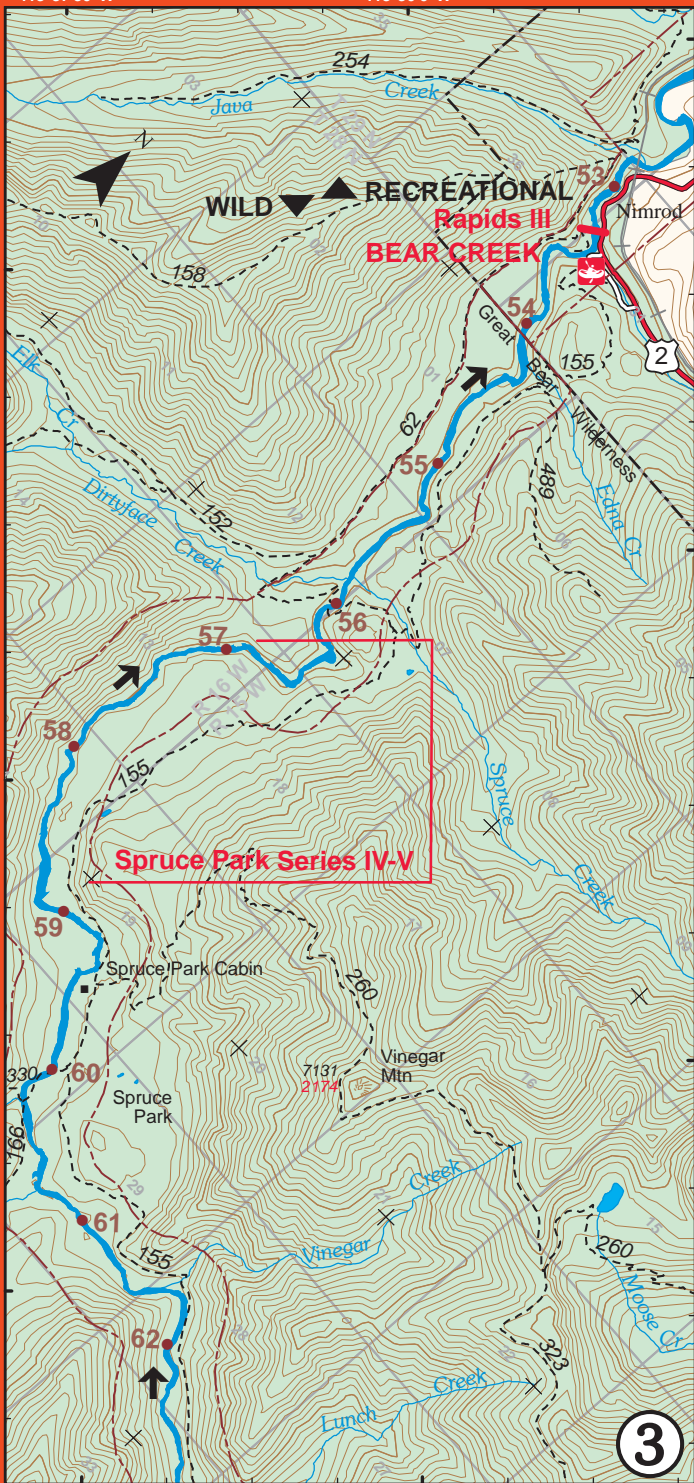
48°12'0"N

48°10'30"N

48°9'0"N

48°13'30"N

48°12'0"N



113°30'0"W

113°28'30"W

3

**RM 49-48: Essex River Access** - The river access is rustic with a native surface for launching.

*Essex is a small railroad town that supports a busy rail yard. The Izaak Walton Inn was built in 1939 to house rail workers. The inn and Walton Ranger Station were named after Izaak Walton, the 17th century author.*

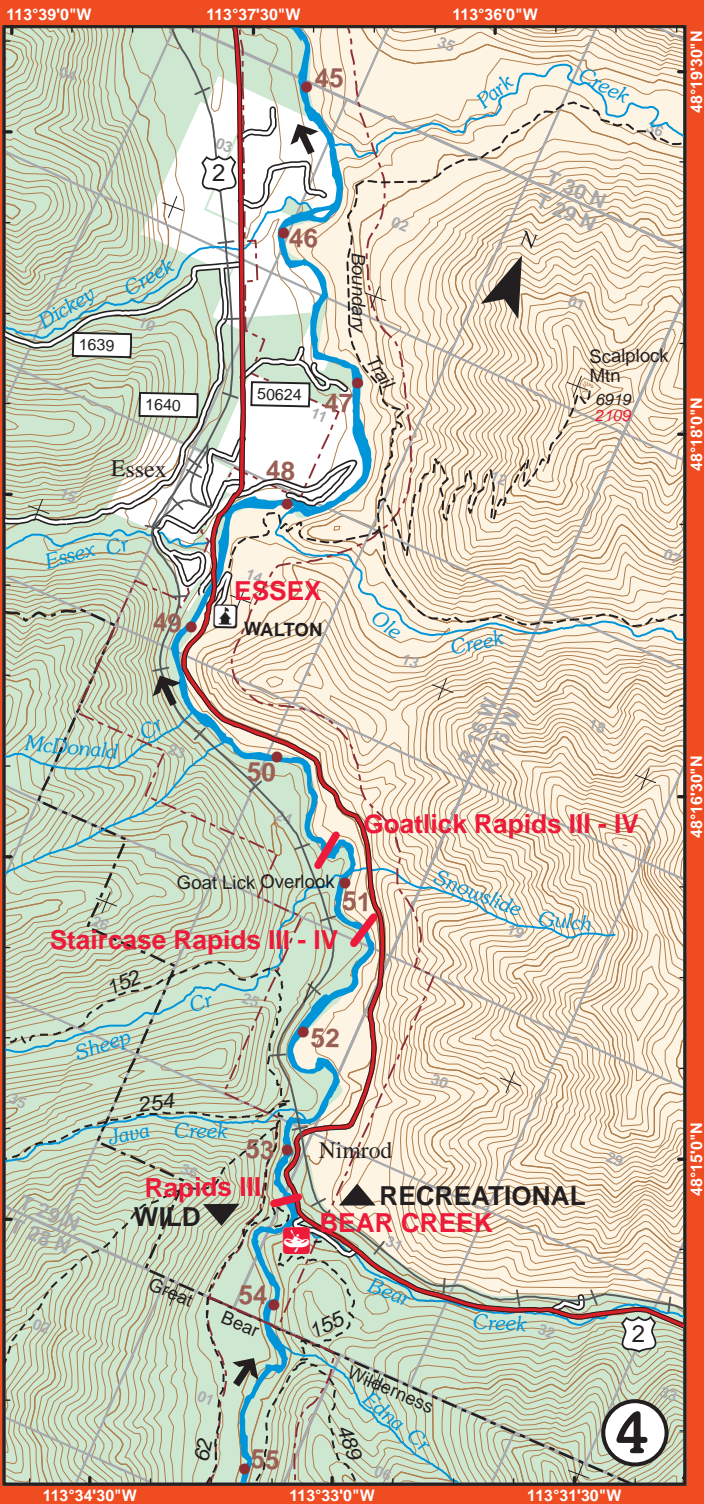
**RM 49: Walton Ranger Station** - The National Park ranger station features the rustic designs of National Park Service stations built in the 1930s. Built for function and strategically located, the station remains active today.



**RM 51: Goat Lick Overlook** - Mountain goats and other animals visit the exposed riverbank to lick the mineral-rich cliffs. No camping in the Bear Creek to Essex section; and no stopping within ¼ mile above or below the Goat Lick Overlook for the protection of the mountain goats in the area.

*The lower Middle Fork runs between US Highway 2 and the Burlington Northern Railroad for most of its course down the canyon; roads to the tracks are closed to public motor-vehicle use.*

*This stretch of river features open flats and deep canyon walls, providing white water rafting and a native cutthroat trout catch-and-release fishery. Permits are required for all overnight backcountry camping in Glacier National Park - river right above the high water line. Permits are available at the Backcountry Permit Center in Apgar.*





### Tips for Catch & Release Fishing:

- Use barbless hooks,
- Land the fish as carefully and quickly as possible,
- Keep the fish in the water,
- If you need to handle the fish, use wet hands,
- Use forceps and other release tools to avoid disturbing the mucous membrane (slime on the fish) and
- Gently hold fish facing upstream to revive, and release.



*The lower Middle Fork provides prime Westslope cutthroat trout habitat. The native trout sport dark spots on a light background. Cutthroat are named for the red slashes near their lower jaw. The marks distinguish them from other trout species.*

**RM 42: Paola River Access** - A popular put in and take out for anglers along this stretch of river. Both the creek and access were named after a Burlington Northern Railroad contractor.

Just downstream from the access site, river right, was the former Glacier National Park Paola Creek Ranger Station. The station was active from 1913 to 1932.



113°43'30"W

113°42'0"W

113°40'30"W

48°22'30"N

48°21'0"N

48°19'30"N

48°18'0"N

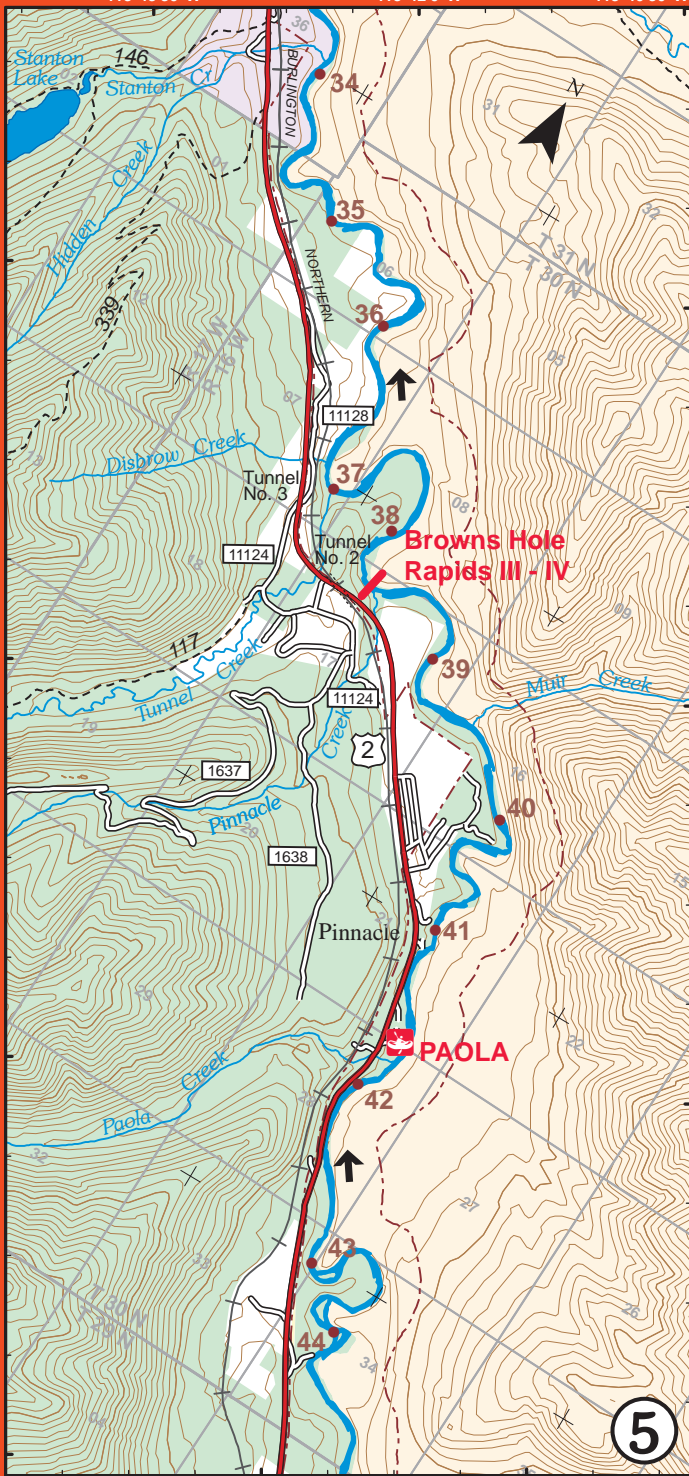
48°24'0"N

48°23'0"N

48°21'0"N

113°37'30"W

113°36'0"W



**RM 26: Loneman Lookout** - Notice the lookout, river right on top of Loneman Mountain. Built in 1930 as part of a network of fire lookouts, it is no longer in use today.

*One of the original railroad stations was located in this area. The Delaware Indian word “Nyack” means corner or point. Historians speculate that Delaware Indians accompanied trappers and mountain men into the Rocky Mountain region.*

*For decades researchers from the University of Montana, Flathead Lake Biological Station have conducted world renowned water quality research in this area. Please do not disturb research devices.*



*River right, notice the patchwork patterns that the 2003 Rampage Fire left behind. The fire created a mix of burned and unburned mosaic areas on the landscape.*

**RM 29-22: Nyack Flats** - Braided channels and numerous log jams characterize this stretch of river. The water depth can change from year to year in the different channels. Grizzly bears regularly swim across this open section of river. In the spring, bears eat the first green plants found growing along the river's gravel bars.

**RM 31: Cascadilla River Access** - Keep your eyes open for the ramp. Campfires are not allowed in the parking lot or on the gravel bars below the high water mark.



**RM 16.5: Belton Bridge** - The original access to Glacier National Park was over this historic bridge. During the 1964 flood the bridge was completely covered with water. The flood washed away the structure, but the concrete arch remained. The bridge was temporarily resurfaced and used until the destroyed West Glacier bridge was rebuilt. Today the bridge is open to foot, bicycle and horse traffic.



BELTON BRIDGE - 1964 FLOOD

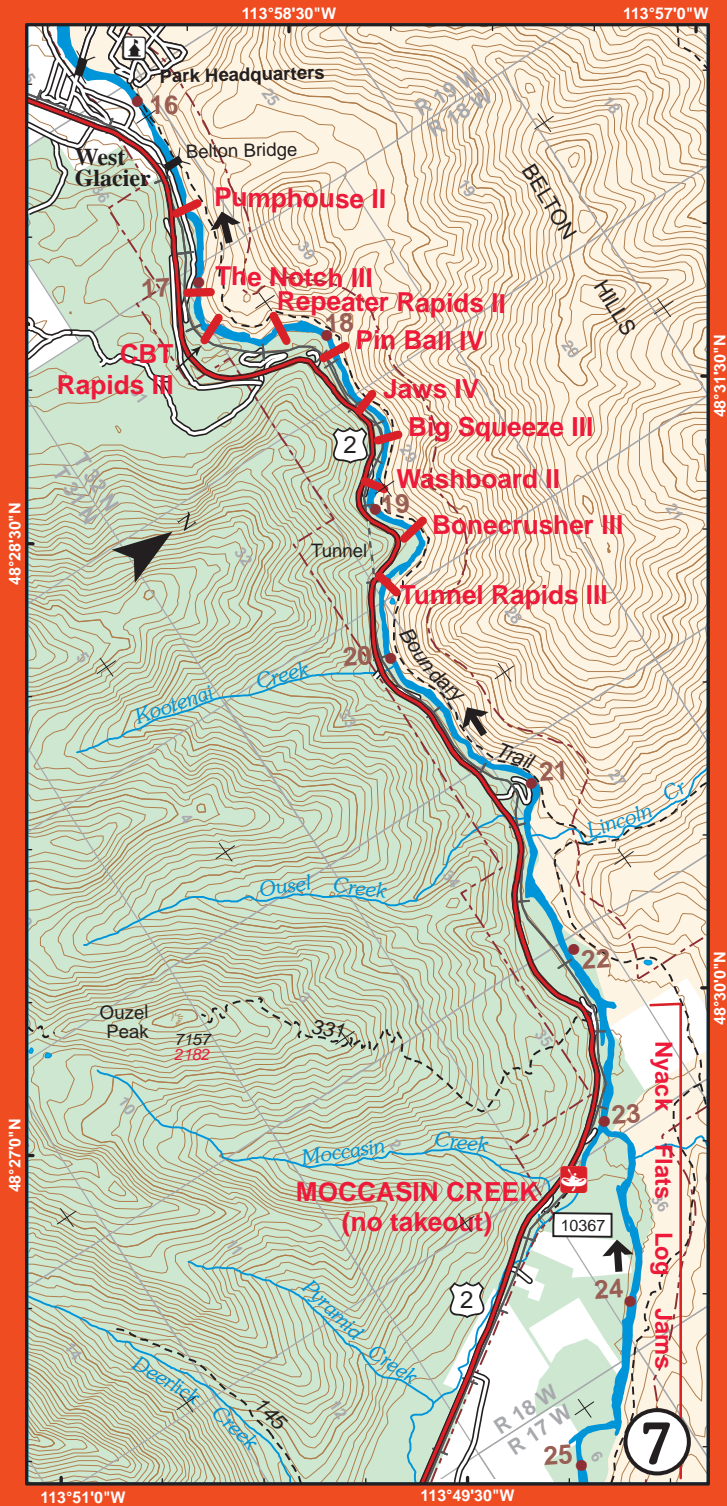


BELTON BRIDGE - PRESENT

**RM 19.5-16.5: Whitewater** - This section is a combination of deep canyons, steep walls, large rock features, amazing glacier-green water and powerful hydraulics especially at high flows. The series is a combination of plunge pools, channel dividing boulders, standing waves, and deep holes. The river drops over 60 feet of elevation through this section. Be aware of newly accumulated runoff debris (root wads and logs). If you are not familiar with this series, scout first.

**RM 24-23: Moccasin Creek Access** - Located on Moccasin Creek, this is the most popular launch on the lower Middle Fork. It is the closest launch to the major white water section of the river. There is no take-out. You will encounter the highest volume of commercially guided public enjoying the waves.







### **RM 9.5: Blankenship Bridge River Access -**

The bridge is located below the confluence of the North Fork and Middle Fork. On river left this site is managed by Flathead County. The area below the bridge, river right, is managed by Flathead National Forest. Overnight use is limited to three nights, overnight users must be self contained for solid human waste and firepans or blankets are recommended.



BLANKENSHIP RIVER ACCESS BELOW BLANKENSHIP BRIDGE

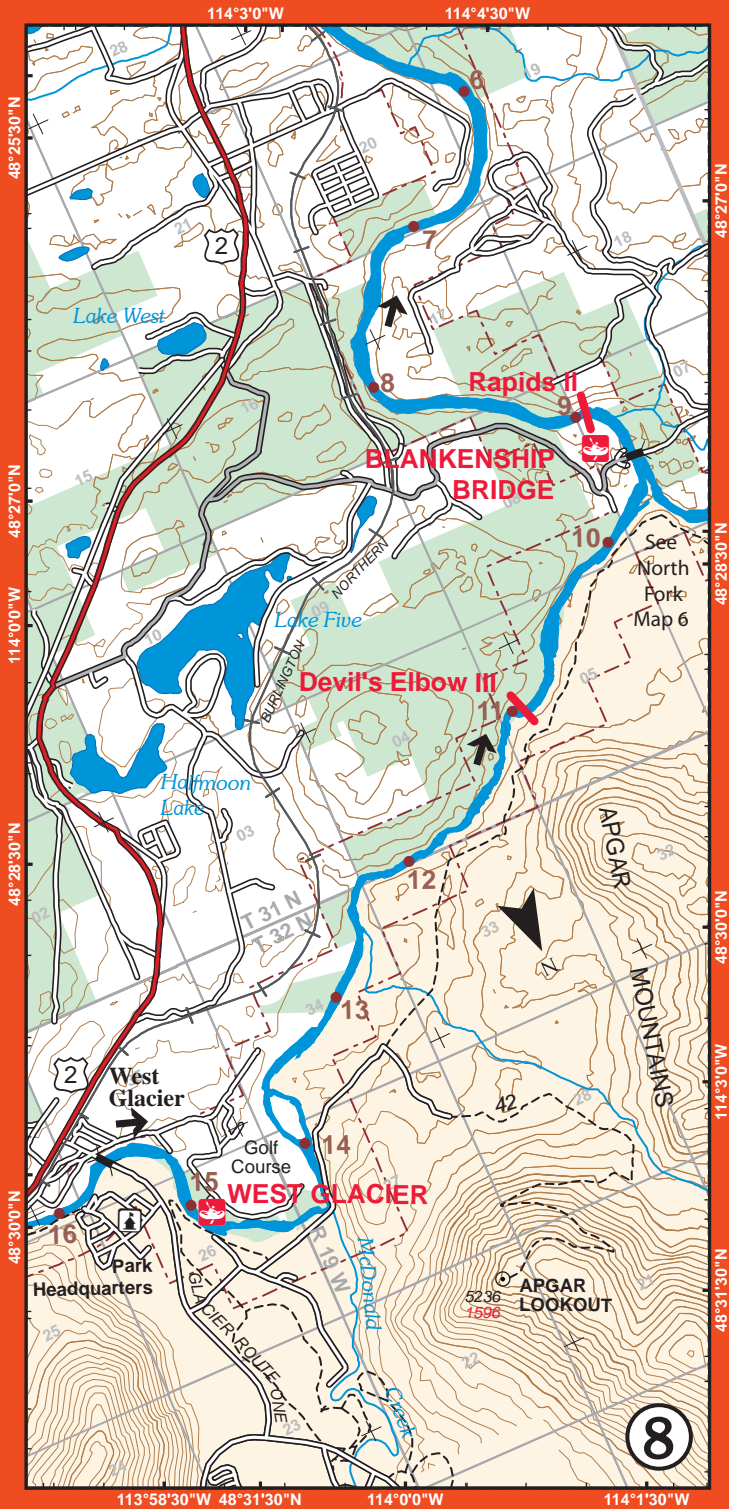
### **RM 10-9: North Fork of the Flathead River -**

The North Fork enters from the north, river right. As the river level drops later in the summer, the gravel bar becomes quite large.

*Fires in 1929 burned a large portion of this area. Dead trees were removed and facilities rebuilt by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. In 2003, the Robert Fire burned through this same area.*

### **RM 16.5: West Glacier River Access -**

Overnight camping and fires are not allowed. Private property adjoins this area. Please respect their rights.



**Teakettle River Access** - A Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks site located river right below the Teakettle Bridge. A part of the “Oakes” steamboat is on display at the site.

**House of Mystery River Access** -

This day-use site is located just outside the canyon. The up canyon winds challenge boaters to crest the white caps. Overnight camping is not allowed.

*Berne Memorial Park, located in Badrock Canyon, is marked by a plaque along US Highway 2 above the rock outcropping, on river left. Mike Berne homesteaded lands in the North Fork and his brother homesteaded the west end of Bad Rock Canyon. He was best known for helping to build the “Oakes”, a 75-foot steamboat for use on the North Fork of the Flathead. The 1892 maiden voyage ended near the mouth of Canyon Creek on the North Fork. There the steamboat ran aground. Parts of the “Oakes” were found all along the lower reaches of the Main Flathead.*

**RM 0: South Fork of the Flathead River** -

The South Fork flows into and joins the Middle Fork from the south. All three river forks are now joined and form the main stem of the Flathead River.

*This last stretch of river offers some of the valley’s finest trout fisheries. As summer temperatures rise, and fish become more stressed, limit the play on your ‘catch’.*

*The river runs through several stretches of private land. The Flathead National Forest purchased Wild and Scenic River easements to protect and preserve the river’s natural course, visual integrity, and water quality. Please respect private land to ensure continued access to Montana rivers.*

